

Applicants respectfully traverse the §102(a), §102(e) and §103(a) rejections.

Below the Walker, Ely et al., and Rowse references that were cited in the rejections, and the invention are briefly discussed. Then, arguments are given to demonstrate patentability of the pending claims.

WALKER("The Mirror - reflections on Inhabited TV")

Inhabited TV is a vision of future television services in which multi-user virtual environments deliver unprecedented levels of audience participation. Social chat and interaction are mixed with professional content and programming to create on-line communities. Six on-line worlds were available to ... viewers of the BBC2 series "The Net" (p.149, Abstract).

Imaging combining the proven pulling power of professional broadcast television with the enduring appeal of audience chat and participation... (p.149, "Introduction", first paragraph).

The producer defines a sophisticated audio-visual framework, but it is the audience interaction and participation that brings it to life (p.149, "Introduction", first paragraph).

People are represented in a 3D environment by characters or avatars, and can move around, converse and interact in a common context of information and applications (p.149, "Shared Spaces", first paragraph).

The starting point of an Inhabited TV "program" is a professionally authored framework analogous to the program structure of traditional broadcast TV. The framework defines

spatial and temporal structures for both a persistent on-line community and a range of "special events" which are played out against the an evolving backdrop. The audience or "citizens" in Inhabited TV are no longer passive couch potatoes, but can choose an appropriate level of involvement in the life of the community and are able to play an active role in special events (p.149, "Shared Spaces", second paragraph).

Audio clips from "The Net" (the BBC2 TV series) were attached to objects with the objective of prompting discussion relating to items in the TV series (p.151, "Play").

The worlds were "open" twenty-four hours a day throughout the experiment (p.152, "Special Events").

Monday evening prior to the broadcast of The Net was "party night" in the world with the same theme as that week's program (p.152, "Special Effects", paragraph "Party Night").

The Mirror was introduced to the half million viewers of the Net ... in the first program of the new series. ... The number of registered citizens of The Mirror rose to 2250, including 300 from outside the UK (p.154, "Experimental Results", first paragraph).

The initial flood of registrations confirmed the power of TV in generating a near-instantaneous response. ... By the end of the first week, users were starting to appear in the spaces (p.154, "Experimental Results", second paragraph).

ELY ET AL. (U.S. PATENT 5,796,424)

Ely relates to a system and method for providing

videoconferencing services (Title).

The system comprises a broadband switch network, a plurality of video cameras, one video camera corresponding to each of a plurality of videoconferencing parties, a plurality of controllers, one controller corresponding to each video camera, a broadband session controller for communicating with each of said controllers, and a broadband service control point connected to said broadband session controller (col.2, lines 40-47).

FIG. 1B is a block diagram of a broadband network for providing video services (col.3, lines 14-16).

(In Fig.1B) The communication connection 116 between settop controller 110 and the broadband switch network 100 may be provided via an access network 108. Access network 108 may comprise the same coaxial cable, fiber optic link, or some hybrid, as broadband connection 116 (col.5, lines 35-38).

Broadband session controller 104 preferably processes signals from an information sender 101 based on instructions provided by the BSCP 106. The interaction of the BSC 104 and BSCP 106 is described in detail below. Broadband session controller 104 also instructs switches 114 of the BSN 100 on when and how to route information (data and broadband) between information sender/receivers 101. Thus, in accordance with the present invention, broadband switches 114 need only limited intelligence since they preferably get routing instructions from the broadband session controller 104 (col.5, lines 9-19).

Broadband session controller 104 processes control signals from set top controller 110 based on instructions provided by the

BSCP 106. Broadband session controller 104 also instructs switches 114 of the BSN 100 on when and how to route data between VIP 102 and settop controller 110 and instructs VIP 102 on when and how to transfer broadband video to settop controller 110 (col.5, lines 48-54).

Session manager processing includes a set of predetermined events (referred to as "triggers") which make the session manager 202 suspend current processing and query BSCP 106 for instructions on how to proceed. Thus, session manager 202 responds to "triggers" and input signals from remote control 118 to provide interactive functionality with a user (col.6, lines 2-8).

The broadband session controller communicates with the user's settop controller and VIPs and requests processing information from the broadband service control point in response to predetermined triggers (abstract).

ROWSE ET AL. (U.S. PATENT 5,565,910)

Rowse et al., relates to a communication network or system for transmitting both data and television signals between a plurality of digital computer workstations. More particularly, Rowse relates to a communication system that employs an industry standard local area network (LAN) for transmitting data and which makes provision for the selective transmission of television signals between user workstations connected on the LAN as well as between a given workstation and a selected remote workstation which is not connected to the LAN (col.1, lines 17-26).

INVENTION

The invention relates to a method of controlling communication to multiple end users at geographically different locations. In a broadcasting mode content information is broadcast for receipt by the end users. In a conferencing mode, at least one subset of the end users is enabled to be interconnected through a network. Interaction is enabled between the end users of the subset via the network. Switching is enabled between the broadcasting mode and the conference mode.

ARGUMENTS

Applicant respectfully traverses the \$102(a) rejection of claims 1-6 as being anticipated by Walker.

As to claim 1, Walker imagines combining the proven pulling power of professional broadcast television with the enduring appeal of audience chat and participation. Within the context of Walker, this relates to the professionally authored framework analogous to a program structure of traditional TV broadcast, the framework being used as a virtual environment supporting an on-line community. Walker discloses an audio-visual framework for a 3D virtual environment wherein people are represented by avatars. Six on-line worlds were made available. TV programs were used to notify the viewers of the option to register for participation. The on-line worlds reflected the TV broadcast material. For example, audio clips from "The Net" (the BBC2 TV series) were attached to objects with the objective of prompting discussion

relating to items in the TV series. As another example, Monday evening prior to the broadcast of The Net was "party night" in the world with the same theme as that week's program.

Walker discloses using themes of a TV program in a VRML world. Walker discloses a professionally authored framework analogous to the program structure of traditional broadcast TV. But this neither teaches nor suggests the use of a broadcast mode and a conferencing mode, and switching between these modes. Accordingly, the rejection of claim 1 is incorrect.

As claims 2-6 depend on claim 1, and as claim 1 has been shown to be patentable over Walker, claims 2-6 are patentable as well. To clarify the additional differences, Walker as applied to claims 2-6 is briefly discussed below.

As to claim 2, Walker's phrase "imagining combining the proven pulling power of professional broadcast television with the enduring appeal of audience chat and participation" is explained above. This neither teaches nor suggests broadcasting the interaction to another set of end-users while in the conference mode.

As to claim 3, Walker does not teach the switching between the modes as explained under claim 1. Accordingly, Walker neither teaches nor suggests the switching being enabled by a specific event in the content information broadcast. The "special events" in Walker were used to ensure attendance and to provide a structure for authors.

As to claim 4, Walker discloses mixing professional content with social conversation in a rich graphical environment.

Walker's professional content and graphical environment relates to the professionally authored audio-video framework, mentioned above, that defines the spatial and temporal structures for the virtual world. This neither teaches nor suggests creating a graphics representation of the video information and supplying the graphics representation in the conference mode.

As to claim 5, Walker discloses representing people by characters or avatars in the 3D virtual environment that can interact with one another. This neither teaches nor suggests that the avatars modify the graphics representation of the video information.

As to claim 6, Walker neither teaches nor suggests broadcasting the interaction.

Accordingly, claims 1-6 are patentable over Walker.

As to claim 7, Applicants respectfully submit that claim 7 as filed specifies "a trigger unit for triggering formation of at least one group of end users upon an event relating to the broadcasting". That is, claim 7 specifies forming a group of end-users. Ely's component 104 is a session controller, but does not itself deliver the content. Content is delivered via networks 108 and 116. Component 104 is therefore not to be considered an equivalent of the server for broadcasting content as specified in claim 7. Further, the processing by session manager 202 includes a set of predetermined events ("triggers") which make the session manager 202 suspend current processing and query BSCP 106 for instructions on how to proceed. Thus, session manager 202 responds to "triggers" and input signals from remote control 118

to provide interactive functionality with a user. There is no mentioning of the formation of a group of end users. Accordingly, claim 7 is patentable over Ely et al.

As to claim 8 that depends on claim 7, Applicants have shown claim 8 to be patentable over Ely. Applicants have specified above that Walker neither teaches nor suggests generating graphics data from the video data. Accordingly, Claim 8 is patentable over Ely et al., in view of Walker.

As to claim 9, Applicants respectfully submit that Rowse neither teaches nor suggest the claim limitation "a coder for coding information received via the Internet from another client". Rowse relates to a plurality of workstations interconnected through a LAN. Rowse does not refer to the Internet anywhere in the spec. Further Walker neither teaches nor suggests the switching between broadcast and a real-time communication channel, as explained above. Also note that Rowse relates to a professional environment. It is not a case of prima facie obviousness to combine the social chat of Walker into the professional system of Rowse. Accordingly, the rejection of claim 9 under §103(a) is incorrect.

As to claim 10 that depends on claim 9, Applicants have demonstrated that claim 9 is patentable, so that claim 10 is patentable as well.

Applicants respectfully submit that they have answered all issues raised by the Examiner and that the application is accordingly in condition for allowance. Such allowance is therefore respectfully requested.

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37 CFR §10.9(b)

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ANNEX

10. The apparatus of claim 9, being operative to render a 3D graphics model received from the server and to make the rendered model accessible to the end user while the end user has access to the communication channel.